

Do You Want Fries with That?

by Sharron A. Scott

www.freethingsforteachers.com

“And would you like fries with that, m’am?” my father asked cheerfully. “Well, it would actually be cheaper if you got the value meal.”

He was working the drive through that day, and in my opinion, he was just a little too cheerful about it. You would have thought he had gotten promoted to vice president of the Burger World, or at least to manager. But no, this man, who happened to be my father, was excited about working the drive through.

My father, who is a dead ringer for Ned Flanders, has been working with me at Burger World for the past three weeks, since he lost his job at the Black Cola distribution plant. He started working there as a temporary driver right after he got out of the army and worked his way up to manager. This man, who used to be somebody’s boss, is now dishing out fries alongside his 17-year-old daughter.

He works from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. I work from 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 pm. I catch the bus to Burger World from school, then my father and I ride home together in his 1999 Toyota minivan. *Ouch! I am doomed to be a social outcast forever. It will be a miracle if I get a date to the prom.*

“Oh my gosh, like Lilly, is it really true? Is that your *dad*?” asked Amber. Amber is about 4 feet 11 inches, but she has the body of a 20-year-old girl.

“Yep,” I said softly. I was standing at the register. Even though there weren’t any customers in line, I kept looking forward.

“Isn’t that weird--working with your dad?” she asked in her annoying, whiny voice.

“No, you’re weird,” I mumbled, just loud enough for her to hear me.

“What?”

“I said, 'I'll be glad when 10 o'clock gets here.’” Thankfully a woman with two children pulling on her appeared in my line. “Oh, look, I have a customer,” I said dryly.

It was 10 o'clock. Dad wasn't ready, as usual. He was always doing something extra, like cleaning the restrooms or putting on an extra batch of fries, even if he wasn't scheduled to do it. *If he gets employee of the month week, I will surely die. If they put his picture up, you might as well just shoot me.*

On the ride home, my dad still sounded cheerful, but tired.

“Wow! Skipper, we had a lot of business today, didn't we?”

“Yes,” I mumbled, as I looked out the window into the darkness. I wanted him to stop talking to me. I wanted to disappear.

“You know, Ms. Speight came through the drive through today,” he said. She told me to remind you that you have a quiz on Macbeth tomorrow.”

“Oh, okay,” I said, hoping he would shut up.

“Yep, good old Macbeth, I remember reading that story.”

He was going on and on about his high school days. I ignored him while I focused on trying to make myself disappear into the car seat.

The next thing I knew, we were turning into Food Mart.

Are you serious? Are you really going into Food Mart with your Burger World clothes on, smelling like french fries? Could you at least take off your hat? I wanted to jump out of the car and run away.

“I just need to pick up some bologna and bread for lunch tomorrow,” said my father. “Are you coming in, Li'l Skipper?”

“Are you crazy?” I mumbled, just a little bit louder than I had intended to.

“What's that Li'l Skipper?”

"I said, no. I'm feeling kinda lazy," I said with a forced smile.

"Alrighty then," he said. Then he pinched my nose and said "Got your nose."

That was really cute, 15 years ago ,when I was two, but now? Not so much. I stayed in the car for a few minutes watching the tired grocery store bagger retrieve carts from the parking lot. Then it occurred to me: I have hit rock bottom. This is it. You can't get any lower than this. **My father. In Food Mart. With his Burger World uniform on. Smelling like fries. On a Friday night.**

Shortly after this revelation my father returned from Food Mart with his bologna and bread.

"Gotcha something."

I hope it's some dignity, I thought to myself.

"Sour Patch Kids!" he said as he pulled them out of the bag.

"Oh, wow! Sour Patch Kids!" I said with fake enthusiasm.

I opened them up and started eating them, even though I had lost my appetite.

Though they were my favorite candy, they didn't even taste the same. Instead of the combination of sweet and sour, they tasted like a combination of failure and embarrassment.

The rest of the ride home was uneventful. I was able to avoid a real conversation with my dad with a few well-placed "really's" and "is that so's."

When I got home I hugged my mom quickly, patted my six-year-old little brother Sam on the head, then headed to the shower to wash away the french fry smell and, hopefully, some of the humiliation.

When I got out of the shower, my mother was waiting for me in my room.

I scrunched my face up like I'd seen an elephant. My dog, Scruffy, sat beside my mom on the bed, as if he were a welcome guest. *That little Traitor. He was*

supposed to protect my room, not invite intruders in. I gave Scruffy the evil eye. I wanted to yell at my mother and say, "EXCUSE YOU!" but I knew better because, in my mother's words, "Momma don't play that."

"Lilly, we need talk," she said. But what she really meant was, "Lilly, you need to listen while I talk."

I sat quietly across from her in my feathery green butterfly chair, while Scruffy sat comfortably next to my mom. I couldn't believe that Scruffy had sided with my mom. He was sitting over there like he was her dog.

"You should be ashamed of yourself ... the way you treat your father."

Scruffy lifted his head up a little and looked at me with disdain.

Unbelievable!

"What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about," she said. "You're not stupid"

"Well, maybe I am, because I really don't know what you're talking about."

"You need to check your attitude, Little Girl."

Scruffy moved even closer to my mom, as if to show his support for her. *That little shaggy-haired Benedict Arnold. How dare he look down on me, when he's the one who drinks out of the toilet?*

"Your father knows that you're embarrassed by him," she said. "He's just pretending not to notice, pretending that it's not breaking his heart. You barely look at him, treating him like a piece of trash," she said in explosive voice that was just above a whisper (so my father couldn't hear her.) Had my father not been home, her voice would have rattled the house. "This man has worked hard for you to make sure you have a roof over your head and food on the table. Do you know he's still trying to save money to buy you a car?"

OUCH. That really hurt.

Even Scruffy gave me a menacing look. I saw a spark of fire in his brown eyes.

Mom was right. I had been so inconsiderate. I got it, but she kept on talking.

“Do you think that he wants to work at Burger World?”

I just looked at her guilt ridden. I thought the question was rhetorical, but obviously she didn't.

“Well, do you? Do you? “

“No, m'am, I ...”

“SHUT UP AND LET ME FINISH!”

She continued to rant and rave for the next 14 minutes--long after I had gotten the point--then she walked out the room. Scruffy walked out the room behind her, pausing and giving me a smug look on his way out.

“I've got to make this right,” I whispered. “I've got to make it right.”

The next day was Saturday. My father and I were both working that day. He was working 8:00 a.m to 10:00 p.m. I was working 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. As we drove to work, I was so ashamed, I couldn't even look him in the face. I said very little because I couldn't. Every time I tried to say something, it got stuck in my throat.

The morning was pretty much uneventful with Dad working the drive through and me working fries. Then lunch came. Instead of eating lunch with my friends like I usually did, I walked outside to where my father was eating his bologna on bread.

“Uh, is this seat taken?” I asked, nervously.

“Yes, because you're sitting there, Skipper.”

I laughed nervously. He was so corny that he was actually funny. During lunch, we got to catch up. I told him about my new career goal—being a photographer. He listened intently, even though he knew my goal would change in a week. Then he told me how he used to be a photographer when he was in the Army. This was news to me.

On our way home from work, my dad stopped by Food Mart. Bologna was on sale, so he wanted to stock up. As my dad got out of the car I said, “Wait up Dad, I’m coming in. I’m out of Sour Patch Kids!”

We walked in together. **With our Burger World uniforms on. Smelling like Fries.**

Answer the following questions about the selection.

1. In what point of view is the story? What effect does the point of view have on the story?
2. Compare and contrast the narrator’s mother and father. Use specific examples from the text.
3. Remember: Theme is the message that the author is trying to get across. What message is the author trying to get across about parents?
4. Notice the boldfaced words. They are sentence fragments? Why do you think the author chose to use sentence fragments? Do you think that it is appropriate to use sentence fragments in creative writing? Explain.

